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Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Mali

I. Introduction

1. By its resolution 2364 (2017), the Security Council extended the mandate of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) until 30 June 2018 and requested me to report on a quarterly basis on its implementation, focusing on progress in taking forward the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali (see S/2015/364 and S/2015/364/Add.1) and the efforts of MINUSMA to support it.

II. Major political developments

2. Social unrest, protests against the constitutional reform and clashes between the signatory armed groups that dominated the previous reporting period have come to an end. The nomination of an independent observer, the signing of the document of commitments providing for a cessation of hostilities between the armed groups and the resumption of discussions between the Malian parties were encouraging developments. Nevertheless, the implementation of key political and security provisions of the Agreement continued to face significant delays. The Government's decision to postpone the elections, initially scheduled to be held in December 2017, to April 2018 can provide additional space for dialogue and promote inclusiveness in the peace process and thus create an environment more favourable to the holding of elections. On the other hand, the deteriorating security situation is exacerbating an already tense political environment and continues to claim the lives of civilians, Malian uniformed personnel and MINUSMA peacekeepers, while impeding the extension of State authority in the north and the centre of the country.

3. One year after the development of joint benchmarks by the Government of Mali and MINUSMA for monitoring the implementation of the Agreement, some progress has been made on political and institutional, defence and security, justice and economic development measures, as well as in the provision of basic services. Important achievements include the establishment of the Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commission, the organization of the national conference of understanding, the establishment of interim authorities in all northern regions and the launch of mixed patrols in Gao. The exercise has also contributed to the establishment of a systematic, constructive dialogue between the Government and the Mission, in particular in the field of human rights. Nevertheless, during the reporting period, progress on the implementation of the benchmarks was limited.

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A. Implementation of the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali after the end of the interim period

4. Following the resumption of violent clashes between the armed groups during the previous reporting period, the signatory movements signed a document of commitments on 20 September, agreeing on: (a) a definitive cessation of hostilities; (b) the resumption of discussions on the joint finalization of the timeline for the full implementation of the Agreement; and (c) confidence-building measures for the cantonment and the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration process. This was followed by reconciliation talks between the signatory movements in Anéfis from 5 to 11 October, with the financial and logistical support of the Government and the international community. The signatory movements discussed, among other things, a political settlement of the ongoing intercommunal conflicts, the release of detainees and the identification of missing persons; and the root causes and consequences of the conflict. They also agreed that traditional judges (*qadi*) would adjudicate crimes committed by the signatory groups since 2017, instead of the formal justice system. My Special Representative, in cooperation with the Government and Algeria, intensified his good offices efforts with the movements' leaders to facilitate dialogue and assisted them in overcoming obstacles. He also underscored the fundamental role of the International Commission of Inquiry in addressing justice-related issues. On 11 October, the movements produced a road map for the implementation of the commitments. Furthermore, they established reconciliation committees to visit the northern regions to disseminate the content of the agreement reached in Anéfis.

5. On 21 October, the Agreement Monitoring Committee met a delegation of the Security Council visiting Mali. In his remarks to the Council, the Minister of Defence and Veteran Affairs said that the implementation of the Agreement was on track. The signatory movements, for their part, stated that the Government was taking unilateral action, notably the promulgation on 2 October of the laws on territorial communities, without sufficient consultation with the signatory armed groups. The President of the Council welcomed the movements' cessation of hostilities but expressed deep concern at the delay in the implementation of key provisions of the Agreement. He warned that the progress made thus far was not yet irreversible and urged Malian parties to accelerate the implementation of the Agreement. The Council reiterated its support for the Monitoring Committee and called for increased national ownership of the peace process.

6. The Agreement Monitoring Committee met in a regular session on 24 October, during which it was announced that the Carter Center had accepted the role of independent observer. The Government, for its part, announced that the Malian parties would meet under the auspices of the Prime Minister to make progress on the priorities relayed by the Security Council. The Government also indicated its readiness to address the concerns raised by the movements, including on the decentralization and local governance laws, the upcoming elections and the revision of the Constitution.

7. At its meeting on 5 December, the Agreement Monitoring Committee decided that thenceforth Algeria and MINUSMA would attend all discussions of the Malian parties as observers and, as and when required, mediate differences and provide technical support.

8. The mixed monitoring and verification teams conducted coordinated missions with military observers in Kidal Region, in areas in which ceasefire violations had been reported during the previous period under review. Conclusive evidence was difficult to obtain, however, given that the incidents had occurred in remote areas. No ceasefire violations were reported during the reporting period.

Political and institutional measures

9. On 14 and 19 September, respectively, the National Assembly approved the Territorial Communities Code and the Law on the Free Administration of Territorial Communities, which set the framework for the State reform and decentralization process. The Code was promulgated on 2 October by the President, Ibrahim Boubacar Keita. On 15 October, the Coordination des mouvements de l'Azawad (CMA) issued a communiqué in which it deplored the fact that some provisions of the political and institutional measures included in the Agreement had not been incorporated into the Code, which therefore limited decentralization.

10. On 5 October, the Council of Ministers convened the Electoral College for 17 December for municipal, district and regional elections. On 23 October, political opposition leaders questioned the feasibility of upcoming elections, considering the poor security conditions prevailing in the north and the centre, and criticized the lack of consultations between the Government and other national stakeholders. Those reservations notwithstanding, on 1 and 2 November opposition parties registered their candidates for the elections. On 28 and 30 October, the signatory armed groups threatened to boycott the elections in December 2017 if core provisions of the Agreement were not first implemented and the law on decentralization revisited.

11. My Special Representative extensively used his good offices and held several meetings with senior government officials, signatory armed movements and majority and opposition political parties, urging restraint and calling for constructive dialogue in support of the electoral process. After intensive consultations with key stakeholders, on 26 November the Council of Ministers announced that the elections scheduled for December would be postponed to April 2018 to create the space necessary to address the concerns raised.

12. In the meantime, MINUSMA provided technical, logistical, advisory and security support to prepare for the elections, including the deployment of materials and staff to electoral districts in the northern regions and Mopti, as well as to electoral management bodies, including by introducing new electoral tools to strengthen the credibility and transparency of the electoral process, and early warning mechanisms on election-related violence.

13. Owing to the prevailing insecurity, the number of State officials redeployed to the northern and central regions fell by 6 per cent during the reporting period. As at 15 December, only 28 per cent of State officials were present at their duty stations in the northern regions and in Mopti Region, with Mopti being affected the most by the decrease. Governors of all the northern regions except Taoudenni have been deployed to their respective regions.

14. In this context of prevailing insecurity, no progress was made on the redeployment of judicial officers to northern and central Mali, and the percentage of officials deployed to those areas remained the same as in the previous reporting period. The judges of Goundam and of Gourma-Rharous in Timbuktu Region, who relocated in the previous reporting period owing to insecurity, have not yet returned to their posts, impeding access to justice.

15. Following the transfer of power from the regional council to the interim authority in Kidal on 6 November, the 13 members of the Kidal interim authority attended their first regular working session, held from 25 to 28 November. Consequently, all interim authorities can now be considered operational. Over the reporting period, they contributed to the reopening of the high school in Kidal and the rehabilitation of health centres and schools, as well as the digging of boreholes in Timbuktu, Ménaka, Gao and Taoudénni Regions. Nevertheless, the grants provided by the Government notwithstanding, the rehabilitation of infrastructure and

equipment and persistent funding gaps remain a challenge and continue to hamper their effectiveness.

Defence and security measures

16. Since the end of September, the signatory parties, through the Integration Commission and the National Council for Security Sector Reform, have held working sessions on the definition of criteria and quota requirements for the integration of former combatants into the armed and security forces. The signatory parties agreed on most eligibility requirements for integration and quotas for paramilitary forces but have not reached an agreement on the number of former combatants to be integrated into the armed forces. The Government proposed a phased process that would begin with the integration of 4,900 former combatants, while the signatory groups insisted on the integration of between 10,000 and 14,000 former combatants. The lack of a consensus on an integration quota for the armed forces continues to delay the launch of the cantonment and disarmament, demobilization and reintegration processes, in addition to security sector reform. The National Council for Security Sector Reform developed a road map for the finalization of the national security sector reform strategy.

17. On 2 November, the National Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Commission reiterated that socioeconomic reinsertion projects could begin only after the combatants of the signatory movements had entered the cantonment and disarmament, demobilization and reintegration processes. Signatory movements have yet to submit the lists of their combatants who will participate in the process, as they await clarification on quotas and integration criteria. Work to upgrade the security features of the eight cantonment sites continues in the meantime.

18. While MINUSMA continued to upgrade the Operational Coordination Mechanism camps in Kidal and Timbuktu, both camps were ready to receive a first contingent of participants as at 12 December, and in accordance with the decision of the Technical Commission on Security on the same day. Nevertheless, the operationalization of the Mechanisms in Kidal and Timbuktu remains pending as the signatory parties continue discussions on the cantonment and the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration process. Moreover, they have not yet submitted their lists of participants. Over the reporting period, the trust fund for peace and security in Mali supported the operationalization of the Mechanisms in Kidal and Timbuktu through projects worth $2 million. Their full operationalization remains pending, however, owing to disagreements between the signatory armed groups on the modalities thereof.

19. To enhance the effectiveness of the Operational Coordination Mechanism in Gao, the Technical Commission on Security agreed that armed groups would temporarily provide heavy weapons to their elements. That recommendation has not yet been implemented. Disciplinary measures introduced during the previous reporting period continue to be actively enforced. For example, it was reported that several members of the Mechanism in Gao were removed from their positions for misconduct.

20. To improve ceasefire monitoring, the Technical Commission on Security agreed to additional control measures for the armed groups, including the use of distinctive vehicle flags and identification badges, the establishment of a list of authorized approvers for mission orders and the obligation for MINUSMA to approve any movement of more than five vehicles or heavy weapons. Those measures took effect on 23 October. Should the signatory movements violate the new measures, MINUSMA and partner forces can arrest convoy personnel and confiscate vehicles or armaments.

21. On 16 November, the Prime Minister's Cabinet endorsed the final draft of a national strategy to prevent and combat violent extremism and terrorism in Mali. The strategy, drafted over the course of a year, incorporates the main pillars of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy under a comprehensive approach.

B. Support to the Malian defence and security forces

22. The memorandum of understanding between MINUSMA and the Government on the Mission's support to the Malian armed forces was signed on 8 November. It establishes procedures for cooperation and support in the conduct of coordinated operations, logistics and operational support, information and intelligence sharing, medical evacuation, explosive ordnance disposal, transport, planning and training. The conclusion of the agreement has led to increased cooperation in the field, including coordinated convoy air cover, medical evacuation and force protection of checkpoints and bases. MINUSMA has also begun to review, in conjunction with the Ministry of Security and Civil Protection, the memorandum of understanding on the Mission's support to the Malian security forces, including the police, the gendarmerie, the National Guard and civil protection.

23. The Mission has trained 92 Malian defence and security personnel in explosive-threat mitigation since mid-September. These courses provide Malian forces with the skills required to plan and execute improvised explosive device search and detection operations and to establish a sustainable explosive ordnance disposal capacity.

24. MINUSMA, in cooperation with other international partners, continued to support the Malian security forces, including the Malian Specialized Judicial Unit against Terrorism and Transnational Organized Crime, in addressing serious and organized crime and terrorism, through co-location and training activities, as well as technical assistance on crime investigation management and forensics. During the reporting period, 201 Malian defence and security officers, including 34 women, were trained in Gao, Mopti and Bamako in fighting terrorism and organized crime and in supporting the Government's integrated plan for securing the centre of the country.

25. During the reporting period, MINUSMA and partners provided training to 1,489 members of the Malian security forces from Bamako, Gao, Mopti, Timbuktu and Ménaka Regions, including 144 women, on various policing modules. Of those, 58 were trained on community-oriented policing, whereupon the Malian police launched the community-oriented policing process on 4 October.

26. The Office of Counter-Terrorism continued to implement its Integrated Assistance for Countering Terrorism framework for Mali. In close collaboration with the Group of Five for the Sahel, it is developing a regional such framework for countering terrorism. That initiative will support the efforts of Member States to prevent violent extremism and will improve border security management, the rule of law and justice, and the role of women in security sector reform.

C. Regional developments

27. The headquarters of the Group of Five for the Sahel force in Sévaré attained initial operational capability on 17 October. The Group's first joint force operation, "Hawbi", was conducted in the tri-border area between Burkina Faso, Mali and the Niger from 27 October to 11 November.

28. MINUSMA established a 20-person force headquarters forward command post in Sévaré, which serves as, among other things, a liaison to coordinate action between MINUSMA force units, the Group of Five for the Sahel force, Operation Barkhane

and the European training mission. All international and Malian forces meet quarterly to determine common strategic objectives and coordination measures.

29. Insecurity in Mali continued to have significant subregional repercussions. Asymmetric attacks against local security forces carried out by terrorist groups, including the Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims, Islamic State in the Greater Sahara and Ansar al-Islam, in the tri-border area between Burkina Faso, Mali and the Niger intensified. Soum Province in Burkina Faso and Tillabéri Region in the Niger were particularly affected.

30. At the initiative of the Economic Community of West African States, a regional conference on the security situation in the Sahel and West Africa was held in Bamako from 12 to 14 October. The participants adopted the Bamako Declaration, in which a call was made for increased information sharing and operational cooperation between international forces operating in the region, together with the increased involvement of civil society in the development and implementation of deradicalization, rehabilitation and reintegration initiatives.

31. The Malian peace process remains an integral part of the United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel, which was also reiterated at the meeting of the strategy's steering committee held in Dakar on 27 October.

III. Major security developments

32. During the reporting period, the security situation worsened and attacks against MINUSMA and Malian defence and security forces increased and intensified. Terrorist groups, in particular the Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims, appear to have improved their operational capacity and expanded their area of operations, based on the Mission's findings and an increase in the number of casualties owing to terrorist attacks. Targeted attacks against civilians in the central region continued. Attacks between signatory armed groups have stopped since the cessation of hostilities agreement signed between CMA and the Platform coalition of armed groups on 20 September. On 20 October, the National Assembly extended the state of emergency for an additional year.

A. Asymmetric and other attacks

33. The security situation in northern and central Mali remains of grave concern, especially in Mopti and Ségou Regions, where more terrorist and terrorist-related events occurred than in the five northern Malian regions combined. Attacks on convoys and security posts with small arms fire and with improvised explosive devices occurred both in central and in northern Mali. On 15 October, terrorist elements shelled a position of the Malian defence and security forces in Kouakourou, Mopti Region, with explosive devices seen in use thus far only in northern Mali. Mopti and Ségou were particularly affected by incidents of intimidation and aggressive proselytizing among civilians by terrorist elements. In Gao and Ménaka Regions, terrorist groups conducted lethal attacks with small arms and improvised explosive devices against MINUSMA and Malian defence and security forces on the Ansongo-Ménaka axis. Some of the attacks were claimed by the Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims, and others may have been carried out by Islamic State in the Greater Sahara. MINUSMA received reports that the two groups were operating in parallel and possibly cooperating.

34. Attacks on high-ranking State officials and institutions in central Mali also increased. The President of the Niono Court, in Mopti Region, was kidnapped on

16 November, less than a month after the deadly ambush that targeted the convoy of the President of the Malian High Court on 31 October, in Mopti Region. MINUSMA is exploring strategies for enhancing security for courts together with the Government.

35. During the reporting period, terrorist groups conducted 71 attacks (37 against Malian defence and security forces, 31 against MINUSMA, including 4 against MINUSMA contractors, 2 against a signatory armed group and 1 against Operation Barkhane), while during the previous reporting period there were 53 attacks. The highest number of attacks was carried out in Mopti Region (20), followed by Gao (17) and Kidal (14); Ségou saw 8 attacks, while Ménaka and Timbuktu Regions each experienced 5 attacks and Koulikoro 2. The Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims, in particular, was highly active in Gao, Kidal and Ménaka Regions and claimed most of the asymmetric attacks conducted during the reporting period. The number of casualties also increased, with 11 peacekeepers killed and 44 injured; in addition, 4 MINUSMA contractors were killed and 4 injured, whereas in the previous reporting period 3 peacekeepers were killed and 22 injured.

36. Malian forces were most heavily targeted and the number of victims increased: 23 soldiers were killed and 8 injured, compared with the 17 killed and 34 injured in the previous period. Attacks against the Malian security and defence forces were most heavily concentrated in Mopti (15), followed by Gao (8), Ségou (7), Timbuktu (4), Koulikoro (2) and Ménaka (1) Regions. Two members of the signatory armed groups were also killed in terrorist attacks.

B. Protection of civilians

37. Since August, MINUSMA has observed a constantly lower rate of armed banditry in Timbuktu Region, with an average of less than 15 incidents a month from August to November, compared with an average of 20 a month from January to July 2017. MINUSMA patrols, more proactive Malian defence and security forces, stronger engagement from signatory armed groups and civil society mobilization can be credited with the improvement. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees reported the voluntary repatriation of 623 former Malian refugees from Mauritania and Burkina Faso to Timbuktu Region in the October–November period. These preliminary numbers represent an increase compared with the June–September period. While diverse factors may be causing these returns, MINUSMA reports that they could be partially attributed to a perceived improvement of the security situation in the region.

38. The Mission remains concerned by the deterioration of the protection environment in Mopti Region, where insecurity is hindering the authorities and hampering the Mission's ability to operate, and where the quick-reaction force has not reached full operational capability. Violent extremist and radical armed groups are asserting control over increasingly large areas, enforcing extremist religious dogma, threatening civilians with violence if they cooperate with the Malian authorities, and in some cases engaging in violent reprisals when faced with resistance. The repeated targeting of the Malian civilian authorities further illustrates these groups' intention to undermine State authority. From late September to October, cases of intimidation by radical armed elements were also reported in several localities of Niafunké district, in Timbuktu Region (adjacent to Mopti Region), including threats against teachers, which led to the closure of schools in at least three communes.

39. The Government is pursuing the redeployment of the Malian defence and security forces as part of the integrated security plan for the central regions. Early in November, the Prime Minister announced the imminent redeployment of State

authorities to the Tenenkou and Youwarou districts. As part of the Mission's efforts to support the integrated security plan, MINUSMA launched two trust fund projects supporting the redeployment of the Malian security forces to Kouakourou and Dialoubé, in Mopti Region. United Nations police patrols covered up to 19 regional markets in October and November. During the reporting period, the Mission implemented 40 community violence reduction projects in the five northern regions and Mopti, which benefited at-risk young people.

40. The Peacebuilding Fund allocated a new contribution of $8 million to address the deteriorating security situation in Ségou and Mopti Regions through four joint projects on empowerment of young people and women for reconciliation and conflict prevention.

Mine action, weapons and small arms

41. MINUSMA trained 61 personnel in safe and secure weapons and ammunition storage and inspections as part of efforts to curb the proliferation of small arms and light weapons. The Mine Action Service raised awareness of explosive hazards among vulnerable populations in conflict-affected areas, reaching 4,529 individuals, including 1,156 women and 2,432 children.

42. Training and mentoring efforts to MINUSMA troops contributed to mitigating threats from improvised explosive devices targeting the Mission's convoys. In this context, the ratio of MINUSMA victims per roadside incident has been halved since 2014, partly as a result of the provision of specialized training and equipment.

IV. Human rights situation

43. The human rights situation remained of serious concern. In Mopti and Ségou Regions, the expansion of violent extremist groups continued to threaten the fundamental freedoms of movement, religion and conscience. Counter-terrorism operations by the Malian defence and security forces led to human rights violations, including enforced disappearance and arbitrary detention.

44. MINUSMA documented 170 cases of human rights violations and abuses involving 326 victims, compared with 112 cases and 348 victims in the previous reporting period. The cases included 1 enforced disappearance, 5 cases of ill-treatment and 28 cases of unlawful detention. The Malian forces were involved in 33 violations.

45. During a raid on 1 October in Kidal, Operation Barkhane personnel arrested seven individuals, at least two of whom were arbitrarily detained. The detainees were later released.

46. The Malian authorities arrested 141 individuals in connection with the conflict, of whom 123 were arrested on terrorism-related charges, including 4 boys and 2 women. As at 11 December, 64 had been released. During the period under review, 1 individual was forcibly disappeared, 25 individuals, including 6 boys, held on terrorism charges remained in detention in State institutions and 15 individuals were detained by the gendarmerie without an arrest warrant.

47. During the reporting period, Kidal Region recorded a decrease in human rights abuses following the signature of the document of commitments by CMA and the Platform. CMA released 23 individuals captured during the clashes of July 2017 with the Platform, but continues to hold 6 individuals, while the Platform continues to hold 1 individual.

48. MINUSMA continued to work with the Government in combating impunity and promoting reconciliation. In November, MINUSMA shared 107 cases of human rights violations and abuses with the Ministry of Justice for review and follow-up. The Mission continued to support the operationalization of the Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commission, although progress remained slow. As at 10 December, 1,598 additional individuals had provided statements to the Commission, bringing the total to 7,737.

49. As part of its capacity-building mandate, MINUSMA trained 1,729 members of the Malian armed forces, including 135 women, in human rights and humanitarian law in Bamako and the regions.

50. MINUSMA continued to engage the signatory groups in efforts to combat gender-based and conflict-related sexual violence, through advocacy and technical assistance. On 24 November, MINUSMA launched the 16 days of activism against gender-based violence campaign.

51. The country task force on monitoring and reporting on grave violations against children continued to document several such cases. In November, a child was killed and another injured when a civilian transport vehicle hit an explosive device near Ansongo. During the reporting period, 6 boys aged between 14 and 17 years were separated from armed groups, and 2 of them were reunited with their families, bringing to 21 the number of children separated from armed groups since August. Advocacy is continuing for the release of four other children, aged between 16 and 17 years, who were formerly associated with armed groups and remain in government-run detention centres since April 2015.

52. On 12 December, CMA nominated its regional focal points in Bamako, Gao, Timbuktu and Kidal Regions, who were tasked with the implementation of the action plan on grave violations against children, including their recruitment and use and sexual violence, signed on 5 March with the United Nations.

V. Humanitarian situation

53. Humanitarian funding remained insufficient to meet current needs and provide life-saving assistance to the 1.36 million people targeted in the 2017 Humanitarian Response Plan. As at 11 December, only 43 per cent of the $305 million required had been received.

54. The deteriorating security situation, limited presence of State authority and lack of sustainable development gains in central and northern Mali further affected the already dire humanitarian situation.

55. During the reporting period, 29 security incidents including kidnappings, break-ins of compounds and vehicle thefts affected humanitarian actors. On 27 November, seven international non-governmental organizations operating in Menaka issued a joint communique in which they announced that they were suspending their activities owing to security concerns.

56. As at 9 November, the Government had registered 40,600 internally displaced persons, 17,400 refugees, 490 asylum seekers and 577,438 internally displaced and refugee returnees. The number of refugees in Burkina Faso, Mauritania and the Niger fell from 140,900 to 133,300.

57. The national rate of acute malnutrition in 2017 was estimated at 10.7 per cent, still exceeding the emergency threshold of the World Health Organization of 10 per cent. During the reporting period, food insecurity worsened in Timbuktu, Mopti and Kidal Regions. The World Food Programme provided food to 260,000 of 601,000

severely food-insecure people and further assisted 45,000 newly displaced persons. The situation is likely to deteriorate further in 2018, with 4.1 million of 18.9 million people expected to be food-insecure in Mali during the lean season of 2018, from June to the end of August, and some 800,000 severely food-insecure, which would represent an increase of 300,000 people compared with 2017.

58. The United Nations Children's Fund and partners have provided life-saving treatment to more than 10,000 children suffering from severe acute malnutrition between September and October 2017, with more than 89,900 children being admitted for treatment in 2017.

59. In October 2017, at the beginning of the new school year, 582 schools were closed, compared with 500 in June 2017. The closures were a result of insecurity, including direct threats and attacks from violent extremists.

VI. Socioeconomic development and cultural preservation

60. The persistent fragility of the security situation notwithstanding, Mali experienced a stable 5 per cent growth of its gross domestic product in 2017, which is projected to continue into 2018. Nevertheless, the Government faced budgetary pressures because of the deteriorating security situation in the north and the centre of the country, leading to unforeseen increases in defence expenditures at the expense of social programmes. Since the holding of the International Conference for the Economic Recovery and Development of Mali in October 2015, the Government has disbursed more than $1.1 billion to northern regions through the emergency and reconstruction plan for the implementation of the Agreement.

61. The Government, with the support of MINUSMA and the United Nations country team, finalized its road map towards the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, structured around four levers: (a) structural transformation of the economy; (b) reducing inequalities and eradicating poverty; (c) building resilience and environmental sustainability; and (d) strengthening governance and security. Addressing the root causes of conflict through investments in these areas is needed to establish a foundation for peace and stability.

62. During the reporting period, the Mission approved 18 quick-impact projects worth $694,337. Those projects served to improve access to drinking water and health care, create economic opportunities, foster social cohesion and support regional and local authorities in Gao, Mopti and Timbuktu Regions.

63. With regard to cultural preservation, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization and MINUSMA continued to raise awareness of the protection of cultural heritage and efforts to combat illicit trafficking in cultural goods through advocacy and capacity-building activities for civilian and military personnel.

VII. Outline of the Mission-wide strategic plan

64. As requested by the Security Council, MINUSMA took the steps necessary to advance the political, institutional, defence and security-related provisions of the Agreement, notably in support of the extension of State authority, the holding of elections and the establishment of interim political and security arrangements, as well as the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration and cantonment processes.

65. In accordance with resolution 2364 (2017), MINUSMA developed a plan setting out a strategic approach for a phased implementation of its mandate, as well as for the eventual transition and exit of the Mission. This plan was jointly developed with

the United Nations country team and is intended as a living document that will continue to evolve through discussions with partners during the coming months.

66. The transition plan draws heavily on benchmarks agreed with the Government of Mali and the priority areas of the United Nations Development Assistance Framework Plus 2015–2019, to which MINUSMA contributes. It will be refined pending the finalization of the MINUSMA strategic review in March 2018, which will provide further guidance on the future direction of the Mission, before the renewal of its mandate in June 2018.

VIII. Capacities of the Mission

Military

67. The force level of up to 13,289 military personnel comprised 40 military observers, 486 staff officers and 12,763 contingent personnel. As at December, 11,617 personnel had been deployed, or 87 per cent of the authorized strength. Women accounted for 2.13 per cent of the military personnel.

68. The implementation of the recommendations of the technical review conducted in July 2017 was initiated during the reporting period. The recommendations include the review of force protection and defence measures, the deployment of a force headquarters forward command post to Mopti and the consolidation of Sector West camps to decrease camp protection requirements and to increase manoeuvre units' operations. The closure of Camp Elevage, in Gao Region, is planned for 31 December 2017. Intensified efforts by the Secretariat notwithstanding, an intelligence surveillance and reconnaissance unit could not be generated for Kidal. Consequently, the Gao-based intelligence surveillance and reconnaissance assets will assume additional such functions for Sector North.

69. The lack of armoured personnel carriers, including mine-protected vehicles, remained a major obstacle to the Mission's operations. From July to December 2017, MINUSMA lost 12 armoured personnel carriers, or approximately two per month. MINUSMA continues to require an explosive ordnance disposal company, a tactical transport aviation unit, a special forces company and a medium utility helicopter unit, for which the United Nations has received pledges and begun the deployment process. A ground alert defence system was deployed to Gao in November 2017. The first of four combat convoy companies deployed to Gao in October 2017 and is expected to become operational by mid-December. A second company will be deployed early in 2018. One medium armed utility helicopter unit for Sector North remains a critical gap. MINUSMA is conducting a contingent-owned equipment validation exercise to identify non-relevant equipment to improve its statement of unit requirements. During the 2017 United Nations Peacekeeping Defence Ministerial, held in Vancouver, Canada, in November, a dedicated side event to facilitate force generation for MINUSMA was held and resulted in several pledges being made. With the scheduled deployment of the remaining combat convoy companies and taking into account the recent pledges made, the Mission is projected to achieve its full operational capability in 2018.

Police

70. The ceiling of 1,920 police personnel comprised 345 individual police officers and 1,575 formed police personnel. On 7 December, 1,746 police personnel, or 90.9 per cent of the authorized strength, were deployed, with 313 (90.7 per cent) individual police officers, 17.1 per cent of whom were women, and 1,433 (91 per cent) formed police unit personnel, 4.7 per cent of whom were women. A specialized

intervention team of 35 elements (included among the 1,433 formed police unit personnel) was deployed on 27 September to support the Mission's crisis response. MINUSMA police continued to require 11 armoured personnel carriers for formed police units and 12 armoured cars and improvised explosive device protective equipment for individual police officers. The Mission also still requires officers with specialized expertise in the fields of forensics, investigations, riverine police, security sector reform, counter-terrorism, trafficking, serious organized crime and project management.

Civilian personnel

71. As at 11 December, 81 per cent of all MINUSMA civilian staff had been deployed, including 43 per cent of international staff, 47 per cent of national staff and 70 per cent of United Nations Volunteers. Women held 27 per cent of the international posts, 19 per cent of national staff posts and 32 per cent of United Nations Volunteer positions.

72. In line with the recommendations of the civilian staffing review, the Mission deployed additional staff from Bamako to regional offices to achieve the objective of regionalization and decentralization. Staff deployment to northern regions increased by 10 per cent in 2017, and, by the end of the current fiscal year, 105 personnel will have been deployed to Gao to fully staff the regional logistic hub. The Mission also increased its civilian presence in Ménaka. A number of staff were temporarily relocated from Timbuktu to other locations, including Bamako, following attacks against MINUSMA premises in that region. Owing to the improvement of security measures for the camps, the Mission initiated the gradual return of Mission personnel to Timbuktu.

Camp construction and securing supply routes

73. The Cotonou-Niamey-Gao supply route to service camps in eastern and northern Mali is now fully operational, and the new centralized warehouse facility in Gao has begun operations. Combined with the forward operating warehouse in Mopti, the warehouse will significantly improve the delivery of goods to the regions.

74. Niamey airport in the Niger will be a staging area for the rotation of some 5,000 military and police personnel in the second quarter of 2018, while the Gao airfield is undergoing rehabilitation.

Environment

75. MINUSMA continued efforts to reduce its environmental footprint by focusing on the rational use of water. To that end, MINUSMA recycled wastewater from wastewater treatment plants in Bamako, Timbuktu and Gao for gardening. Work to connect ablutions systems to the recycling water network is ongoing.

IX. Safety and security of United Nations personnel

76. The security situation remains a significant challenge for all United Nations personnel involved in programme delivery. The 2018 programme criticality assessment for Mali was adopted by the United Nations in Mali on 5 December and will be used in conjunction with security risk management assessments to identify mitigation measures and alternative programme delivery strategies, if needed. MINUSMA remains the United Nations entity most targeted by asymmetric attacks, and humanitarian actors are increasingly affected. The Department of Safety and Security of the Secretariat has requested a revision of programmes to ensure that

activities implemented can be balanced against security risks in accordance with the revised programme criticality framework.

77. The Mission continued to seek technological security solutions to reinforce the security of its camps. Perimeter reinforcement work designed to mitigate the risk of intrusion by armed elements was ongoing. Moreover, side wall blast protection was designed for all buildings inside MINUSMA camps and will be constructed over the coming months. Overhead protection for sleeping units for camps in Gao, Kidal, Menaka, Mopti, Tessalit and Timbuktu was approved and the procurement process initiated.

78. MINUSMA medical capabilities were improved through the deployment of two air mobile evacuation teams in Mopti and the provision of training on standard operating procedures for casualty and medical evacuation. In Timbuktu and Kidal, the Mission deployed two commercial specialized aeromedical evacuation search-and-rescue helicopters with night-vision capabilities, along with an integrated aeromedical evacuation team. In addition, each of the Mission's level II hospitals was equipped with an aeromedical evacuation team and equipment as a separate module capable of configuring in any available air asset to provide medical evacuation services.

79. To bridge existing communication gaps, the Mission implemented joint medical evacuation training aimed at providing a realistic training opportunity for military personnel who deal with medical evacuation and enhance effective communication between the medical personnel and the air crew.

80. MINUSMA provided training on the search and detection of improvised explosive devices and on other threat mitigation measures to 2,100 Mission military personnel, both before deployment and upon arrival in Mali. MINUSMA also delivered a specific course for convoy commanders on leading these operations in an asymmetric threat environment. Similarly, as part of ongoing efforts to increase the preparedness of troop-contributing countries, the Mission delivered training of trainers to Cambodian and Nepalese explosive ordnance disposal instructors in their respective countries to enhance the contingents' capability and autonomy, with view to reaching full operational readiness once deployed to Mali.

X. Conduct and discipline

81. No new allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse have been reported since the issuance of the previous report. The three allegations received in January and June 2016 and August 2017 are pending investigation by the relevant troop-contributing countries. MINUSMA continued its prevention activities, including training, public information and outreach activities to inform personnel and the local population about the United Nations standards of conduct, in particular the zero-tolerance policy on sexual exploitation and abuse.

XI. Observations

82. I remain deeply concerned about developments in Mali and the negative trends observed. The peace process has yielded but a few tangible results. More than two and a half years since the signing of the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali, many of its provisions, in addition to important institutional reform processes, remain only partially implemented. These are, however, essential for the consolidation of a peaceful, resilient and inclusive Malian nation State, while tangible progress in the peace process is the only way to achieve lasting stability in Mali and the region.

83. In this light, I welcome the renewed commitment by the signatory parties to resuming dialogue and ending hostilities, which is a step in the right direction. It now behooves all parties to the Agreement to seize the momentum generated by the agreements reached in Anefis and to assume full ownership of and responsibility for the peace process. I urge the Malian stakeholders to agree on timelines and the main provisions of the Agreement and to accelerate its implementation. I also welcome the decision of the Agreement Monitoring Committee to appoint the Carter Center as an independent observer to monitor the implementation of the Agreement. I remain hopeful that this will reinvigorate the peace process. Moreover, the establishment of a sanctions regime for Mali by resolution 2374 (2017) will help to identify those who seek to disrupt the peace process, including among the signatory parties.

84. The conduct of transparent, fair and peaceful elections is instrumental to the implementation of the Agreement. The completion of the presidential and legislative elections in 2018 will pave the way for the return of State authority and the consolidation of the ongoing decentralization process and will be decisive for the future of Mali. I note the Government's decision to postpone the local and regional elections to allow time to address the concerns of stakeholders. I call upon all parties to maintain a conciliatory stance towards one another, to overcome their differences through dialogue and to ensure that the elections are as inclusive and participatory as possible.

85. The renewed dialogue on disarmament, demobilization and reintegration and on security sector reform is encouraging. While I hope that these discussions will bear fruit, I should like to stress that the inability of the signatory parties to reach an agreement on integration criteria and quotas, the unwavering support of MINUSMA and international partners notwithstanding, has prevented the effective launch of the cantonment and the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration process for the past two years. I urge the signatory parties to set aside their differences and to agree urgently on the basis of the government proposal, understanding that future adjustments are possible, given that a lasting peace cannot be restored in northern Mali without the successful completion of these processes.

86. I am deeply concerned about the weak presence or the absence of the State in the north and th. .centre of the country. The increase in attacks on government officials has further contributed to the instability and created a fertile breeding ground for violent extremism. MINUSMA will continue to support the restoration and expansion of State authority and the rule of law, including through its support to the Malian armed and security forces, and intensify its efforts in the central regions to counter the increasingly disturbing trends that I have outlined herein. In this regard, I welcome the signing of a memorandum of understanding between the Government and the Mission, which will further strengthen their existing partnership.

87. I recognize the efforts made by interim authorities to restore some social services in the northern regions and strongly encourage the Government to strengthen its efforts to expand the coverage of basic social services to all Malians. In the absence of State authority in many parts of the country, I commend humanitarian actors for providing assistance to people in need in a very challenging environment. I urge all concerned parties to respect international humanitarian and human rights law and to allow the unhindered delivery of humanitarian assistance to people in need, and condemn any obstruction of access and attacks on humanitarian actors in the strongest terms. I urge international partners to contribute the outstanding 57 per cent to the 2017 Humanitarian Response Plan to address the needs of the most vulnerable.

88. I am deeply worried by numerous and continued allegations of human rights abuses committed, including by Malian parties, and recall that the Government has a

unique responsibility to combat impunity, address these allegations and provide access to justice for all.

89. The lack of involvement of women in the peace process remains an important concern to me, and I should like to reiterate that they should be included in all decision-making structures relating to the peace process. I welcome the compliance by all political parties with the 30 per cent quota requirement for women in elective functions, as well as youth representation on the lists submitted thus far for local and regional elections.

90. I commend the commitment of the States members of the Group of Five for the Sahel to tackling threats to peace and security, terrorism and transnational organized crime through the establishment of a joint force. While it has the potential to contribute to an enabling environment for MINUSMA, only a multidimensional approach that addresses the root causes of instability will be effective in countering terrorism, including by improving governance and creating opportunities for young people while bringing those who are disenfranchised back into the fold of society. Consequently, the success of the joint force remains intimately linked to the full implementation of the Agreement. I also emphasize the importance for all national and international forces in Mali to spare no effort to prevent harm to civilian lives and to comply with international human rights and humanitarian law obligations.

91. Insecurity continues to significantly affect the Mission's freedom of movement and capacity to act. The full deployment of the quick-reaction force is eagerly awaited and can have a significant impact on the Mission's mobility and deterrence capabilities in support of its mandate to protect civilians, especially in central Mali. Similarly, the deployment of the first combat convoy company is a welcome development and can release the Mission's infantry battalions from escort duties. Nevertheless, MINUSMA still requires utility and armed utility helicopters, additional escort-dedicated capacities and additional medical capacities. I appeal to Member States to provide their assistance and support, including counter-improvised explosive device expertise, technology and equipment, and to ensure that their troops deployed are adequately trained.

92. I am deeply saddened by the persistent and considerable loss of life among Malian defence and security forces and United Nations peacekeepers. I express my heartfelt condolences and sympathy to the Governments and peoples of troop-contributing countries for their recent losses. I have made improving the safety and security of my staff and United Nations peacekeepers one of my top priorities. Consequently, I have appointed a review team to examine all United Nations peacekeeping missions that suffer fatalities and injuries owing to violent acts. I also call upon Member States to fully fund the Mission's budget for security augmentations detailed in the present report.

93. I welcome the establishment of a systematic, constructive dialogue between the Government and the Mission for joint monitoring of the benchmarks, in particular in the field of human rights. Given the limited progress in recent months, however, going forward I propose to report on and include the full table in my reports on a biannual basis.

94. The upcoming MINUSMA strategic review will provide an important opportunity to further reflect on the multiple challenges outlined herein and how to best take them on. In this regard, MINUSMA has begun developing its transition plan with a view to facilitating a gradual reconfiguration of the United Nations presence in Mali. In the coming months, the Mission will continue to further refine its strategic plan, based on the trajectory of the peace process.

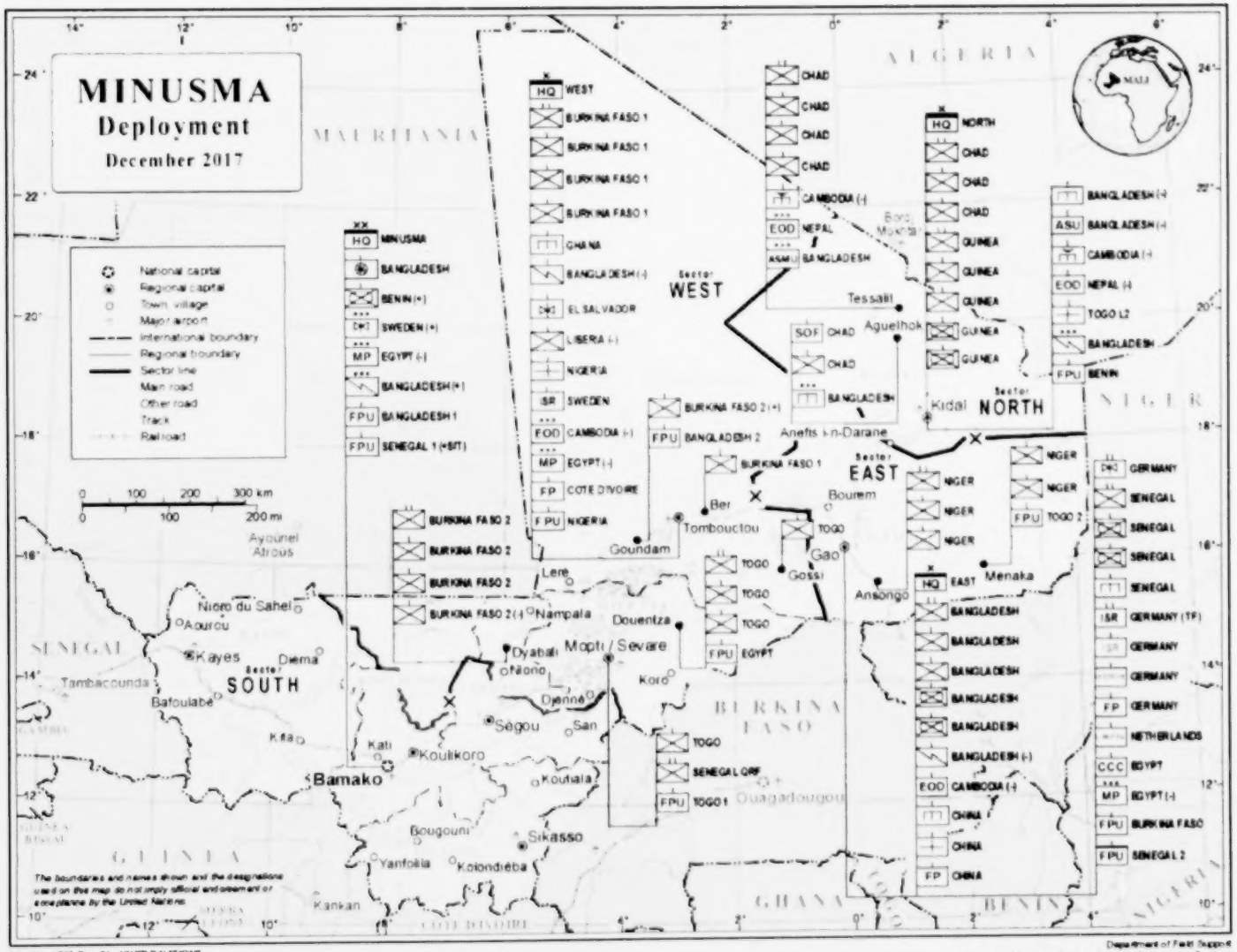
95. I take this opportunity to reiterate my gratitude to my Special Representative, Mahamat Saleh Annadif, for his tireless efforts and commitment. His good offices have been instrumental in restoring some momentum to the peace process. I also wish to express my deep appreciation to the civilian and uniformed personnel of MINUSMA for their work towards the restoration of peace in Mali in extremely difficult circumstances. I commend the members of the international mediation team for their sustained support for the Malian parties and encourage Algeria, as the lead mediator, to continue to support renewed impetus to the implementation of the Agreement through the Agreement Monitoring Committee. Lastly, I express my appreciation to multilateral and bilateral partners, United Nations agencies, funds and programmes and non-governmental organizations and all other partners for their important contributions in support of peace and stability in Mali.

Annex

Military and police strength of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali as at 13 December 2017

	Military			*Police*								
	Staff officers and units			*Individual police officers*			*Formed police units*			*Total police*		
Country	*Men*	*Women*	*Total*	*Men*	*Women*	*Total*	*Men*	*Women*	*Total*	*Men*	*Women*	*Total*
Armenia	1		1									
Austria	3		3									
Bangladesh	1 382	13	1 395				181		181	181		181
Belgium	19	2	21									
Benin	261		261	12		12	140		140	152		152
Bhutan	3		3									
Bosnia and Herzegovina	2		2									
Burkina Faso	1 656	55	1 711	22	1	23	133	6	139	155	7	162
Burundi		1	1	3		3				3		3
Cambodia	295	7	302									
Cameroon	2	1	3	16	2	18				16	2	18
Chad	1 388	6	1 394	12	5	17				12	5	17
China	388	14	402									
Côte d'Ivoire	149	4	153	8	2	10				8	2	10
Czechia		1	1									
Denmark	2	1	3	2		2				2		2
Egypt	324		324	3		3	139		139	142		142
El Salvador	93	11	104									
Estonia	9		9									
Ethiopia	1		1									
Finland	6		6	5	2	7				5	2	7
France	22	1	23	10	1	11				10	1	11
Gambia	4		4									
Germany	539	18	557	10	3	13				10	3	13
Ghana	166		166									
Guatemala	2		2									
Guinea	854	10	864	11	11	22				11	11	22
Guinea-Bissau	1		1									
Hungary				1		1				1		1
Indonesia	8		8									
Italy	2		2									
Jordan	5		5	7		7				7		7
Kenya	6	3	9									
Latvia	2		2									
Liberia	73	6	79									
Lithuania	6		6									

	Military			Police								
	Staff officers and units			Individual police officers			Formed police units			Total police		
Country	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women	Total
Madagascar												
Mauritania	4		4									
Nepal	151	4	155									
Netherlands	286	11	297	5		5				5		5
Niger	851	8	859	19	14	33				19	14	33
Nigeria	72	15	87	2	5	7	126	14	140	128	19	147
Norway	13	2	15									
Portugal	2		2									
Romania	1		1	6		6				6		6
Senegal	1 044	14	1 058	30		30	286	29	315	316	29	345
Sierra Leone	6	2	8									
Spain	1		1									
Sri Lanka	72		72									
Sweden	301	27	328	3	2	5				3	2	5
Switzerland	5		5	4		4				4		4
Togo	902	38	940	11	8	19	262	18	280	273	26	299
Tunisia				46	2	48				46	2	48
Turkey												
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	2		2									
United States of America	22	4	26									
Yemen	2		2	3		3				3		3
Total	**11 411**	**279**	**11 690**	**251**	**58**	**309**	**1 366**	**67**	**1 433**	**1 617**	**125**	**1 742**



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